11 June 1957

Ray S. Cline

"See You Later, Co-ordinator"

Being in favor of co-ordination in the U.S. intelligence community has come to be like being in favor of motherhood or against sin. Everyone piously lines up on the right side of the question. In fact, co-ordination has become what Stephen Potter calls an "OK" word--one which defies precise definition but sounds good and brings prestige to the user. Now I do not want to deny that co-ordination is a good thing, but I would like to suggest that--as with whisky and sleeping-tablets--there can be too much of a good thing. I am afraid the intelligence community is suffering from an overdose of co-ordination.

What Is It?

Part of the trouble is that the word itself covers a multitude of sins and few who are zealous for it stop to define what co-ordination is. In one sense--unfortunately not too commonly understood--co-ordination is the main business of the Director of Central Intelligence, since the public law establishing CIA establishes as its purpose "co-ordinating the intelligence activities" of the departments and agencies of the United

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States Government, including the four major intelligence outfits, State, Army, Navy, and Air.

I am sure that, in the absence of any technical definition by Congress the public statute employed the word "co-ordinate" in its normal Webster's dictionary meaning of "to regulate and combine in harmonious action." This kind of co-ordination is essential and I doubt that we have enough of it.

Unfortunately in the intelligence community the "activity" that has been co-ordinated tirelessly has not been the operational conduct of business or the analytical procedures followed by the intelligence agencies, which the language of the law would imply to a layman, but purely their verbal product in the form of written reports and estimates. Regardless of how inharmoniously the intelligence agencies may engage in "action," they have all settled down relentlessly to co-ordination in the sense of prolonged and detailed joint examination of the words issuing forth from the national intelligence machinery to insure that every agency approves of all the language formulations employed in intelligence estimates.

Since co-ordination is felt to be automatically a good thing, the long and difficult path to unanimity on wording is pursued without regard for time wasted or ideas lost. The search for the happy cliche, acceptable to all, shopworn but durable, frequently ambiguous but always defensible, goes endlessly on.

It is this particular "co-ordination" process that is in a fair way of becoming a millstone around the neck of the Washington intelligence community.

Bureaucratic History of the Word

It is ironic that the word "co-ordination" came into the government lexicon as the harbinger of a liberalizing and energizing influence at work in a musclebound bureaucratic machine. "Co-ordination" was the term hit upon by the Army to describe a system of staff consultation devised shortly before World War II in order to escape from the hidebound staff "concurrence" system then saddling the War Department General Staff with an almost unworkable consultative procedure. Under this post-World War I system, any Assistant Chief of Staff of the War Department General Staff was obliged to get the "concurrence" of the other Assistant Chiefs of Staff on any action affecting their mutual interests. This was true whether the interest of the other Assistant Chiefs of Staff was of major or minor importance.

The word "concurrence" was taken to mean complete endorsement of the views contained in the staff memorandum, the language setting them forth, and the action proposed. This meant that each staff made an independent inquiry into the problem if it was at all important and often threatened to withhold concurrence on fairly trivial grounds. An unwelcome phrase--unwelcome perhaps because of unhappy choice of words--could

spell administrative death for a paper vitally needed by one of the General Staff Divisions. Like co-ordination in the intelligence community, concurrence was considered so much a good thing that a "non-concurrence" was a thing to be avoided at all costs in time and effort. The result of course was fantastically slow action on War Department business.

The difficulty of getting a fully concurred memorandum through the War Department General Staff in the emergency years of the late 1930's was so great that the more energetic staff officers began to despair of ever being ready or able to fight World War II. It was in this atmosphere that the co-ordination system developed and the formal concurrence concept was discarded.

The new procedure presumed that the officer proposing action was--on behalf of his Staff Division--entirely responsible for presenting information and making recommendations. He was obliged to show his study and proposals to appropriate officers in other Staff Divisions with overlapping interests to insure that they had no reasonable grounds deriving from other actions they were taking for dissenting from the proposed action. The ultimate objective was "harmonious action" and prompt decision. Quibbling over phrases and details became unpopular under the pressure of need for speed and results.

The result was that officers consulted in this informal fashion could initial a paper as having been "co-ordinated" with them without feeling that they were taking full responsibility for the phrasing of the study or the recommended course of action. Co-ordination merely proved that officers legitimately concerned had seen the paper and had interposed no objection that dissuaded the action officer from proceeding. If he chose, of course, the officer consulted in this fashion could delay indicating co-ordination had been accomplished until he was sure his boss did not want to dissent formally, which was still open to him if the matter genuinely and importantly affected his interests.

This War Department General Staff co-ordination system was so successful in World War II that it became a matter of doctrine and folklore. In the armed services it became a truism that a paper not carefully "co-ordinated" was not a good staff paper. There is much to be said for this point of view, and this kind of co-ordination is surely the responsibility legally placed on CIA in intelligence-matters--that is, the obligation to consult and discover the views of other interested parties in order to insure "harmonious action." I wish it carried with it the original connotation of performing this essential consultative task with reasonable speed and without sacrifice of individual responsibility for describing the situation requiring action.

The Intelligence Co-ordination Treadmill

The intelligence community of course does not recommend action but it does describe situations which ought to be meaningful in terms of actions policy-making officials are considering. A good intelligence estimate is not an abstract exercise in cerebration but is a pointed analysis of a situation relating to national security. It ought to be as effectively presented and phrased as a good Staff action paper, perhaps even better since the subject matter is likely to be more abstract and the nuances and color in author's choice of words is likely to be vital to a subtle understanding of the situation being described.

By some lower-level-of consciousness reasoning co-ordination in the intelligence business has in practice come to mean word-by-word concurrence of all the intelligence agencies.

This practice has not only remarkably slowed down the production of intelligence estimates at the national security level but has insured that when fully co-ordinated estimates do emerge into the daylight they usually reflect the carefully-considered, carefully phrased views of nobody in particular. They are the drab and soulless products of a bureaucratic system which seems so have a life and limping gait of its own.

the time when Clive was off.

These harsh remarks are not intended to suggest that our national intelligence estimating machinery is of no value. To the contrary, I would like to make clear at the outset that I think the initial organization of this machinery in 1951--with which I am very proud to have helped--is one of the major advances in the history of the U.S. intelligence business. It is obviously desirable for the government officials making national security decisions to have available in written form the best composite judgments of the interagency intelligence community on the main strategic situations affecting US security.

Even with the deficiencies I have hinted at, the coordinated national estimates provide a sort of floor of common knowledge and common agreement under the policy making process. At a minimum they serve the purpose of preventing wild ideas from carrying the day in the absence of effective confrontation with the agreed general view. In the old days it was perfectly possible for one agency to produce a little thinkpiece setting some preposterous theory about Soviet intentions and through their own staff channels present it on the highest policy level without it occuring to anyone to question whether or not this represented the best intelligence views of equally well informed people in the intelligence community. I trust this does not happen now, or at least that

there are a great many people who would stand up at some point during the policy consideration to say that such a proposal should be checked out against the national intelligence estimates. This is clearly a net gain of enormous worth.

What I am suggesting, however, is that we have won that net gain at the price of making our estimates much less timely, interesting and useful than they could be. If we had not allowed ourselves to become so devoted to the concept of co-ordination of the written word at all costs and at all lengths, I feel we could do a better job of presenting the best views available in the intelligence community rather than the lowest common denominator of agreed doctrine.

The first great defect of our co-ordination technique is merely the staleness that passage of time brings to a long-disputed thesis. In principle of course the national intelligence machinery can bring out an estimate in short order. I believe that there are in history the recorded cases of estimates written and agreed in two or three days. These were very short estimates produced under circumstances of extraordinary urgency. It is enough to say that what is usually called a "crash" estimate is usually produced in around two weeks time. Your good solid national intelligence estimate runs anywhere from six weeks to six months. Perhaps we can

afford the luxury of writing estimates at this pace, but I very much doubt that the estimates so produced are as useful as they would be if produced much more rapidly. Unhappily in this dilatory system they are bound to contain very few surprises when they do come out and very little of immediate interest to our policy makers. The natural reaction of a busy executive upon coming across a national intelligence estimate is to himself, "I have heard all of this somewhere before."

Much worse than this out-of-date quality, however, is the second great defect of the co-ordinated estimate, which is the flatness of ideas agreed by four or five contributing draftees. It is simply not true that the more people and the more views you have represented in the drafting of a paper, the better the paper is. Sometimes a brilliant paper slips through relatively unmarred in drafting sessions in which a large number of people are involved, and usually superficial polish is added. But too often papers which, however imperfectly phrased and controversially put, made a contribution to knowledge at the beginning of this process emerge either so long afterwards that all of the sparkle of the basic idea is lost or so much watered-down and flattened out as to be virtually meaningless.

The reason is that any group of working-level government officers brought together to "co-ordinate" a paper in the sense of getting absolute agreement on recommending every word of the paper as being true, are under an enormous obligation to their bureaucratic superiors to emasculate any sentence which suggests or might suggest the contrary of a view held in their particular part of the bureaucratic forest. This tends to bring on a process of horse-trading in which every interested party secures his privilege of excluding an objectionable phrase in return for permitting the exclusion of some sentence anathema to another representative, although it may not be at all objectionable to the rest of the group. Add up four or five or six of these representatives as parties to the proceedings--and add in the normal personal vagaries in reacting to someone else's prose--and you speedily reduce a paper to its lowest common denominator of meaningfulness.

After all, we are all familiar with the phenomenon whereby most people feel that it is only possible to express their own ideas in their own words and you have an almost impossible situation for anyone trying to draft a simple, cleancut view of a complex intelligence problem.

Consultation Instead of Over-Co-ordination

I too happen to like my own prose better than the words used so clumsily by other people. Unfortunately I have discovered

that my colleagues also seem to prefer their own, even over mine. My way of solving this problem, and the problem of many drafters representing multiple interests, is to determine whether a paper is mainly my paper or my colleague's paper on the basis of subject matter. If it is my paper I strongly believe that the best way to get the main ideas across is for me to draft it in my own words, presenting it in the way that seems to me to be most effective.

At that point in drafting I like to consult all of my colleagues, whoever they may be and whatever agency they may work for, who know something about the subject. Inevitably I get a considerable amount of static, both on the main ideas and the words in which they are put. This I think is healthy, and in many cases I am persuaded, either that I am wrong in what I was trying to say--in which case I want to change it by all means--or that I have not presented it very effectively--in which case I am anxious to rephrase it in the light of my failure to put it across. It may be that I think my colleagues are simply dense, but nevertheless I ought to adjust my verbal presentation of the problem to carry them along with me in understanding the subject and my view. All this consultation with the best minds of the community is desirable, even essential. It is what I consider to be co-ordination properly understood.

name one

In other words co-ordination is ideally a process of consultation with knowledgeable and interested members of the intelligence community for the purpose of learning new information, taking account differing views, and insuring the most effective presentation of an intelligence analysis. In many cases I think it is true to say that a person drafting a paper on a broad and complex subject is obligated to accept the information supplied him and in general to adopt the interpretive views held by the most expert and responsible people, wherever they work. This sharing of knowledge is the whole rhyme and reason of working as an intelligence community.

On the other hand, if there is any function for a central and co-ordinating group in the intelligence community, it is precisely in the sphere of subjecting to careful inquiry the views of all members in the community on situations cutting across specialized departmental interests, making presenting the a valid synthesis, and/general truth of the matter in an effective manner, even though it may not fully please any single member of the group. If when this process has been accomplished a responsible member of the community still feels that the paper makes a major substantive error, as distinct from being badly expressed, then I think it would be most proper for the dissenting person to express himself as effectively as he can in language of his own choosing setting forth where he feels the basic paper is wrong.

This last point--the right of major dissent--is an important one. In many complex intelligence problems, I know from experience that it is often the most effective way to discover the essential outlines of a tricky situation by having an analyst present his case and then listening to the views of any dissenting analyst. I submit that the net result of a strong view of this sort with a substantive dissent is much more helpful and meaningful to the person who actually needs to know something about the situation than in a compromise set of general cliches which do not indicate the difficulty and conflict of view inherent in the situation as seen through the evidence the intelligence community possesses.

We all agree / dif. of framing dissent

The sum and substance of what I have been saying is that the US national security system would be better served if the intelligence community took a less vigorous view of the meaning of co-ordination and substituted more informal techniques of consultation. In this way the intelligence community could share knowledge and wisdom without delaying or weakening their product.

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It would work like a consulting group of physicians, one a general practitioner and the rest specialists. If the situation under examination was a kind calling for specialized analysis (an eye or ear problem in medicine, a diplomatic or

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air problem in intelligence) then the burden of responsibility for diagnosis and treatment would fall on the specialist (eye or ear man in medicine, State or Air Force in intelligence) with the general practitioner (CIA in intelligence) advising and consulting in the general diagnosis. If the disease was complex and cut across specialist lines, then the general practitioner (CIA in intelligence) should take responsibility for the diagnosis and treatment, consulting and using the skills of the appropriate specialists (State, Army, Navy, Air, et. al.) In no case should the doctors fuzz up the diagnosis to disguise the fact that they could not agree among themselves or let the patient die while they argued.

And what of the DCI's legal resp.

TRANSMITTAL SLIP DAT 6/4/57

TO: Mr Sherman Kent

ROOM NO. 107 BUILDING Admin

REMARKS:

For your info and amusement. It is a first draft and I probably should revise it a little if they propose to publish.

Yes indeed - but how?

STAT

FROM:

STAT

ROOM NO. 2503 BUILDING M EXTENSION

STAT

FORM NO. 241 REPLACES FORM 36-8 WHICH MAY BE USED.
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